**Jenna Rendeiro**

**Purpose:** To explore the uniqueness of *The Invention of Hugo Cabret* and look into Brian Selznicks style. Explain why this type of novel is beneficial to use.

**Audience:** Classmates or writers that are writing children’s literature and teachers choosing children’s literature

**Genre:** Reflection: *Reader-as-Writer*

**Engagement**: Discovering how this different approach to children’s literature can encourage children to read and focus on the details that make it special. This will help myself and others to see what a story like this is made of, and how to recreate something like it.

LENS4- *Reader-as-Writer*

*The Invention of Hugo Cabret* is a novel like I have never read before. At first, I was intimidated by the size of it, but after just the first few pages, I could tell it was going to be an intriguing and special adventure. As an artistic person and a future teacher, I appreciate the way Brian Zelznick created this novel.

The pictures really bring the story to life. Being able to physically see the characters and the setting is extremely beneficial for students to understand how long ago the story is set. Because the illustrations tell the story before you actually read any text, it gives the reader a chance to predict what is going to happen. Making hypotheses is a great form of deeper thinking for students to engage in and can even form group discussions that kids want to partake in. *Pleasures* describes how pictures help children understand words, especially in terms of how things look. (277) The pictures are like an extra push to participate for students that struggle in reading because the answers lay within the illustrations. Books like this one can really help at risk students make gains in literacy by giving them the confidence they need to keep reading.

Furthermore, the details in his illustrations are intricate, yet they are not in color. After pondering why Zelznick might have done this, I realized that it might be to give the feel of the time period the book is set in, Paris 1931. Whenever we think about a time long ago or see pictures from past generations, we see them in black and white. To me, this slight detail can bring a completely different mood and also open conversation about why this may be. Moreover, *Pleasures* brings up the aspect of authenticity and goes on to say, “Illustrators sometimes use this quality to underpin the reality of fantasy situations.” (281) There are also other real works and people from this time period incorporated into this novel, which can be found on page 532. Zelznick includes a lot of information in the back of the book that is useful if one wants to explore further into the non-fictions parts within the novel.

The particular storyline, following a young orphan named Hugo, is particularly captivating because it is a mystery. There are many ties between characters that the reader does not expect and questions that Hugo is trying to figure out along with the reader as well. For example, when the old man hands Hugo the ashes to what we believe is his notebook and Hugo is sobbing he noticed “The old man seemed to have tears in his eyes, too. Why in the world would *he* be crying?” (138) At this point in the story, we only know the old man as a grumpy toy maker that stole Hugo’s notebook because he had been stealing from him. We do not see the connection the old man has with the drawings in the notebook yet, and it makes the reader want to continue reading in order to find out.

Moreover, Zelznick adds in inspirational quotes that beautifully compliment the hardships the characters are facing throughout the novel. His style of writing in this book shows that seeing the good within the bad makes for a truly moving story. On page 378 Hugo says, “You know, machines never have any extra parts. They have the exact number and type of parts they need. So I figure if the entire world is a big machine, I have to be here for some reason. And that means you have to be here for some reason, too.” In the midst of Hugo’s life falling apart, he still finds a way to see that he must have a purpose, even if he does not know what it is yet. The style of this book is extremely different than most young adult novels. Style is “the effect of all the aspects of a work considered together, the way in which an illustration or a text seems distinct or even unique. Style develops from all the various choices an artist makes, about both subject and means of presentation.” (*Pleasures*, 283) The presentation of this novel is set up beautifully and impeccably engaging. So why not encourage others to choose to create books similar to this?

Many books end happily and leave the reader to imagine what happens to them in the future. While this novel does indeed end happily, it does something different than most books. It skips ahead six months to show how Hugo’s childhood has changed because of Papa Georges, Mama Jeanne, and Isabelle. His entire life took a turn for the better because of them, and theirs because of him. Then the final chapter, “Wind it up,” flashes even further ahead to Hugo as an adult. Although it does not say much, the reader can infer that he made something of his dreams and is a magician. The gaps between time (ironic in this book, on purpose or not?) oblige the reader to imagine what happened during those times to get Hugo to that point. I admire Zelnick for how he concluded this novel because it is different than previous novels I have read. It proves that taking risks and using a different approach to writing can make for a pleasurable read. All in all, “books like these make the delightfully complex pleasures of storytelling with pictures available to a whole new audience.” (*Pleasures*, 299)